



May 23, 2003

Three sentenced to prison for alien smuggling

A federal judge in Rhode Island has sentenced three California men to prison for smuggling illegal aliens across the country. **Enrique Montes**, deemed the ringleader of a smuggling operation, was sentenced yesterday to 24 months. The drivers of a van stopped in Providence last November with illegal aliens in it were sentenced earlier – **Eduardo Valencia-Chavez** on March 31 to 12 months in prison and **Jose Elver Chavez-Perez**, on May 1 to six months.

United States Attorney Margaret E. Curran announced the sentences, which U.S. District Court Judge Mary M. Lisi imposed in U.S. District Court, Providence. In imposing the two-year sentence on Montes yesterday, Judge Lisi took note of the recent deaths of illegal aliens in a truck in Texas to point out the potential danger in smuggling illegal aliens.

At a hearing on February 25 at which Montes pleaded guilty to an alien-smuggling charge, Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee H. Vilker said that, on November 17, agents of the **Immigration and Naturalization Service** observed a white van with six occupants arrive at a pre-arranged meeting spot on Atwells Avenue. Agents arrested the van's occupants and determined that four had been smuggled into the country illegally and two, **Chavez-Perez**, 39, and **Valencia-Chavez**, 40, were transporting the illegal aliens.

Agents determined that the van had started out in California with nine illegal aliens – six from Mexico, two from Bolivia and one Guatemalan. **Valencia-Chavez** and **Chavez-Perez** had

taken turns driving the van across the country. Five illegal aliens had been dropped off at various locations when the two drivers were arrested in Providence.

\$2,500 fee

Investigators learned that **Valencia-Chavez** and **Chavez-Perez** worked for **Montes**, 47, who based his smuggling operation out of his home in Tustin, California. **Valencia-Chavez** told agents that he had made approximately 10 trips in which he had transported a total of about 33 illegal aliens for **Montes**. Agents determined that **Montes** had been running the smuggling business for about 16 months. At the plea hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Vilker said that Montes charged \$2,500 to smuggle aliens into the country and additional fees to transport them around the country.

All three defendants pleaded guilty to conspiring to transport illegal aliens – **Montes** on February 25, **Valencia-Chavez** on January 6, and **Chavez-Perez** on February 6. All three are subject to deportation after completing their prison sentences.

Chavez-Perez forfeited to the government \$2,665 in cash, which agents had seized from him when he was arrested. **Montes** forfeited \$4,265 and 80,250 Mexican pesos (approximately \$8,000 U.S.), which agents seized from his apartment when he was arrested. The defendants conceded the forfeitures in their guilty pleas.

The **Immigration and Naturalization Service** investigated the case, with assistance from the **Rhode Island State Police**. Assistant U.S. Attorney Vilker prosecuted the case.